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2017 -Satpanthi Khojas to Shia Imami Ismaili Tariqa (1089)

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Satpanthī Khoja-s to Shīʿa Imāmī Ismāʿīlī Ṭarīqa
The Construction of Religious Identity of the Khoja-s Imāmī Ismāʿīlī of South Asia

Iqbal Surani
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This paper will examine the construction of religious identity of the Khoja-s Shīʿa Imāmī Ismāʿīlī through a critical study of selected *farmān*-s attributed to the 48th Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, commonly known as Āghā Khān III (d. 1957). These *farmān*-s have been published for the sole use of the believers and therefore they have not been studied academically. However, they are the basic source to which the believers refer to conduct their daily spiritual, cultural and socio-economic lives. By studying these *farmān*-s we will understand how the process of the original Islamic/Satpanthi hybrid community in South Asia has resulted today in the existence of the Shīʿa Imāmī Ismāʿīlī Ṭarīqa.

1 The *Khojkī* Script

What distinguishes the Khoja Ismāʿīlī texts is their preservation until the 1920s in a script called Khojkī (from Khoja). The tradition states that this script was used for commercial transactions by the Lohana and Bhattia castes from Gujarat and Sind. They were converted to the teachings of Pīr Saḍr al-Dīn (Pīr Sadardin) (d. 1416). He modified their script and called it *cālāha akhārī* which means forty letters script. It is also called *khuwājikā akhārā* or *khojikī sindhī*. *Khwāja* (lord) is the name given by Pīr Saḍr al-Dīn to the converts.[1]

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* Ph. D, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), Paris; Postdoctoral Associate, Florida International University (FIU).

I am very grateful to Rosalind Sayers Mazzawi who devoted her time to revise the English version of this article. This article is dedicated to the memory of my late father Shamsuddīn Surani.

1 See A. Asani, "The Ginān Literature of the Ismailis of Indo-Pakistan: Its Origins, Characteristics and Themes" in F. Daftary (ed.) *Medieval Ismaili History and Thought*, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 265-280; G.A. Allana, "Language planning of Pîr Sadaruddin and use of khojiki character",

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This script soon became a tool of cultural and religious identity of the Khoja-s who were to use it to write their texts. Its easy use (type of shorthand) made it accessible to all and encouraged the spread of the texts, whilst preserving them from outsiders. Consequently it became an indispensable tool for the teaching. The religious schools until the 1980s were known as Sindhī-schools in which this script was taught. However, the use of the Khojkī script does not prove the antiquity of the texts. From 1920 onwards the texts were printed in Gujarati lettering.

Today the religious instruction is given in the language of the countries where Ismāʿīlī communities are established. Daily prayers were recited in a language composed of elements of Kutchi/Gujarati, Arabic and Persian in the Ismāʿīlī communities in Asia, Africa and Syria until 1956, after which Arabic took their place.

Although the *farmān*-s might have been issued in the mother tongue of the Imām they were always translated into Gujarati which thus acquired the status of a sacred language. Today English has taken over from Gujarati.

2 The *Farmān*-s

The *farmān*-s are the sayings, recommendations, directions and advice the Imām issues to his followers in both spiritual and temporal matters. The subject of these *farmān*-s cover all aspects of life: spiritual quest, health, hygiene, economic life, education, etc. They are issued in the form of direct commands.

The tradition of collecting the sayings of Imām-s started at the time of the first Shīʿī Imām, ʿAlī (d.661), and has continued until today. The *Nahj al-Balāgha* "Path of eloquence", work of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 1015), is the collection of the sayings, sermons and letters attributed to Imām ʿAlī. For the Shīʿa-s this text is the most authoritative source after the Qurʾān and the traditions *ḥadith-s* of the Prophet Muḥammad.

In the context of the Shīʿa Imāmī Ismāʿīlī, the Imām is the "*bolto qurʾān*" (the living Qurʾān), hence the *farmān* has acquired the power of a divine decree.

unpublished article; G. Allana, *Ginān of Ismaili Pirs*, 1984, pp. 10-25; C. Shackle and Z. Moir, *Ismaili Hymns from South Asia: An Introduction to the Ginans*, London, SOAS, 1992, pp. 34-54; A. Nanji, *The Nizari Ismaili Tradition*, 1978, pp. 8-9. The invention of a specific alphabet in the Indian Subcontinent is not exclusive to the Khoja-s. For example the Sikhs' scripture, the *Ādi Granth*, is written in a script called *gurumukhī*; see D. Matringe, *Les Sikhs*, Paris, 2008, pp. 37-38; p. 237.

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The true believer is the one who is *farmānbardārī*, that is someone who obeys the *farmān*. The opposite is *befarmānbardārī, befarmānī, nāfarmānī*, which means the one who does not obey the *farmān*, he is considered a non-believer.[2]

The *farmān*-s are collected, written down and published in different texts with titles in Gujarati or English: *Gnān-Sangrah, Bahere Rahemat, Khangi Farmān, Kalāme Imām mubīn, Gavhare Rahemat, Kalāme Shāh Karīm, Precious Gems*, etc. They are the basic sources to which the believers refer in the conduct of their spiritual, cultural and socio-economic lives. They are also used as scriptural arguments for the believers, for the *wāʿiẓīn* (preachers) in their sermons and for the religious teachers to instruct the doctrines. The *salawāt* (prayer of blessing upon the Prophet and his descendants) is always recited before and after reading a *farmān*.

Today the main *farmān*-s to which the believers refer are those of Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Āghā Khān III (d. 1957) and of the present Imām, Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī, Āghā Khān IV, (b. 1936). They are the foundations of the doctrines and religious practices of the Shīʿa Imāmi Ismāʿīlī.

The impact of the *farmān*-s of Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh (d. 1957) is such that even today an informal group of believers gather to listen to a preacher who directs the assembly (*satsang*). The members are supposed to learn by heart the texts of *farmān*-s. They claim that the sayings of Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh quench their spiritual thirst. These informal groups are very influential today in spreading the *farmān*-s according to their literal interpretation of the texts.

Concerning the declarations of the Imām who is the interpreter of the Qur'ān, his followers have to conform to his teaching.

The *farmān*-s attributed to Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, the 48th Imām of the Shīʿa Imāmī Ismāʿīlīs contain the following elements in the 1942 edition:

2 *amr*, an Arabic word which means "order", its Persian equivalent is *farmān*. Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh in his *Memoirs* describes the function of Imām as follows: "The Imam is thus the successor of the Prophet in his religious capacity; he is the man who dwells among those from whom he commands spiritual obedience," see Aga Khan, *The Memoirs of Aga Khan*, New York, 1954, p. 18. In their three daily prayers known as *duʿā'*, the believers recite the following verses of the Holy Qur'ān: *sūrah nisā'* [4:59]; *sūrah yā sīn* [36:12] see *Duʿā'*, The Shia Imami Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board for France, Paris, 1997 chap. 2, p. 6; see H.K. Virani, "*farmānbardārī*", Vāyaz Series, Vol. 3 (1951), Ismailia Association for India, Mumbai, pp. 3-8. It is noteworthy to point out that *imāmim mubīn* is translated in English by "book" or "clear record", see Muhammad Asad, *The Message of The Qur'ān*, 1980, *sūrah yā sīn* [36:12] p. 674.

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a) the name of the town where the *farmān* was uttered;
b) the date;
c) the number of *farmān*-s uttered in that town;
d) the opening formula in Gujarati: "*Ḥaqq Maulānā Sarkār Āghā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh Datār Ḥāḍar Imāme farmāvyun ke* ..." ("Our Lord, The True Authority, the Beneficent Present Imām has issued the *farmān*.").
e) the text of the *farmān*;
f) the text always ends with the formula « *Khānavadan* » (May your home prosper).

Regarding the evolution of the introductory formula, we can remark that the initial declaration evoking the Imām's authority over the community has developed in a specifically religious aspect. The introductory formula of the *farmān* of the present Imām in Gujarati is: « *Nūr Maulānā Shāh Karīm Hāżar Imāme farmāvyun ke* ...» (The Light of our Lord the Present Imām Shāh Karīm said that ...).

Today we observe that the text of the *farmān*-s published in different countries where Ismāʿīlī communities are established evolve with their general education and economic development.

The concept of a sacred language is no longer familiar to the community. For example, the present Imām, Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī, speaks in English and in French and his sayings are translated into the language(s) of the countries he visits.

We will provide the translation of some important *farmān*-s which will enable us to understand their meaning and their impact on the believers. Before this, however, some preliminary remarks are necessary. All the *farmān*-s attributed to Āghā Ḥasan ʿAlī Shāh, known as Āghā Khān I (d. 1881), Āghā ʿAlī Shāh, Aghā Khān II (d. 1885) and Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, Āghā Khān III (d. 1957) have come down to us in vernacular Gujarati, a language that the Imām-s did not use. Their mother tongue was Persian. Sultān Muḥammad Shāh, Āghā Khān III (d. 1957) also spoke English and French, he knew Arabic and possibly Hindustani since he was born in Karachi (Pakistan). Āghā Khān IV expresses himself only in English and French. The words attributed to the Imām-s might not be their own or they could have been composed at a later date. However, the value of these texts is that they reflect the religious beliefs of the faithful because for them the Imām possesses all knowledge and understands all known languages. They live by his words, words which weave the close relationship between the *murshid* (guide) and his *murīd*-s (followers).

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The following statement by Maxime Rodinson expresses this well:

> *A text with which one has been familiar since childhood, which one has heard with religious ardour in the most solemn and moving surroundings, that one has oneself spelt out and studied, this represents a total immersion and acquires after a while an indescribable echo.*[3]

3 The Pandiyāt-i Jawānmardī

The Pandiyāt-i Jawānmardī is a collection of the *farmān*-s attributed to Imām Mustanṣir bi'llāh (d. 1480), who was the 32th Imām of the Ismāʿīlī genealogical succession. This work has come to light thanks to the work of Wladimir Ivanow who translated it from Persian into English and published it in 1953. This text was translated into Gujarati by V.N. Hooda who was Ivanow's assistant. This is the how this text has been transmitted to the Ismāʿlī Khoja-s. It had a special destiny; it has been raised to the rank of a Pīr, and as such it is revered as the 29th Pīr in the genealogy of the Pīr-s. In ancient prayers text of the *duʿā'*, this genealogy was recited three times a day until 1956. In this text the precepts of social conduct the believers must follow are laid down. We find here endless reminders concerning the rules of the faith, exhortations, admonitions and declarations in an often tiresome prosaic style full of repetition expressed in a very awkward fashion. If this text has not had a direct impact on the believers but it has certainly influenced the *wāʿiẓīn* (preachers) and it has served as a model for the composition of the earliest *farmān*-s attributed to the first three Āghā Khān-s. On the whole the text is permeated with ethical and moral exhortations.

The method of collecting the sayings of Imām is expressed by the anonymous author of Pandiyāt-i Jawānmardī as follows: "... whenever I was privileged to be present at any assembly, or gathering, or meeting, at which the Imām preached the Advices of Manliness, addressing these and his other instructions to the community of the faithful and followers, I noted down all that he was pleased to utter concerning the (religious) commandments and prohibitions, the high moral qualities, and manners of speaking and living, necessary to human dignity, religiousness, worship, also the duties which would lead to advantage in life in this world and bliss in the hereafter. I have arranged these for the purpose of being used as the means of salvation for those who

3 Maxime Rodinson, *Mahomet*, Paris, 1961, p. 12.

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listen to them and act according to what they have heard. I have given this book the title "*Pandiyāt*," "Advice" ..."[4] Besides the *Pandiyāt-i Jawānmardī*, we should mention the text of *Risāla dar Haqīqat-i Dīn* and the *Kalām-i Mawlā*. These texts have enriched the gradual development of the Shīʿa identity of the Satpanthi(s).[5]

We will now examine selected *farmān*-s from three collections: *Gnān-sangrah*, *Kalāme Imām Mubīn* and *Precious Gems*.

4 Gnān-sangrah: Translation and Commentary of Selected *farmān*-s

Gnān-Sangrah (collection of wisdom) is the only text to survive with *farmān*-s attributed to the 46th Imām Ḥasan ʿAlī Shāh, Āghā Khān I (d. 1881), to the 47th Imām ʿAlī Shāh, Āghā Khān II (d. 1885), and to Shihābuddīn Shāh (d. 1885). The text which is anonymous does not mention the date of publication, does not contain any introduction nor any information about the author. The only information is on the cover: the title and the warning: "Only for the Imāmī Ismāʿīlī-s". Whatever may be the historical value of these *farmān*-s which are transmitted in Gujarati, their significance lies in the reflection of the religious beliefs of the community from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Today the text has been republished anonymously, with no date nor place of publication, which emphasises the value of these *farmān*-s for some of the believers.

> ***farmān* 3, 1916 (*samvat*), the 1st of the month of Jeth [The eighth month of the *samvat* year, corresponding to May-June].**
> *Ḥaqq Maulānā Dani Salāmat Datār Ḥasan ʿAlī Shāh Imāme farmvyun ke:*
> Our Lord, the veritable authority, the munificient Imām Āghā Ḥasan ʿAlī Shāh has said:
> When comes the day of *Qiyāma* (Day of Judgement) all human beings will be standing beside their respective Prophets, you will be seated under my protection. And if you have accomplished good deeds then your soul will be pure.

4 See W. Ivanow, *Pandiyāt-i Jawanmardi*, Leiden, 1953, p. 1.

5 *Risāla dar Haqīqat-i Dīn* or *True Meaning of Religion* is a Persian text attributed to Shihābu'dīn Shāh al- Husayni and has been translated into English by W. Ivanow, and into Gujarati by V.N. Hooda. The *Kalām-i Mawlā* is the collection of the sayings attributed to the first Imām Haḍrat Mawlā ʿAlī; they are in verse form and usually sung on Thursday night at the *jamāʿātkhāna* as *ginān*-s. See I. Surani, *Explication des vertus de la Connaissance dans le Kalâm-i Maulâ*, Paris, 2003, pp. 16-25.

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The person who has followed *ḥaqīqat-marg* (the path of truth) will have the right to our protection. There are dishes of gold, of silver and of clay; who will prefer a clay dish to one of gold?

In the same manner, o Jamāʿat, all other religions are of clay, but your religion *Satpanth* (path of the truth) is of gold. The *Satpanthī* is the best incarnation (*avatār*) and all others turn round and round aimlessly.[6]

The believer who will give the *dasond* (tithe) with sincerity and affection, we will save his seventy one generations.[7] Therefore do not make any mistake with the *dasond* (tithe). If you submit the exact *dasond* (tithe) you will be within the shade of *Amīr al-Muʾminīn* (Prince of believers).

When coming to the *jamāʿat-khāna* (prayer hall for the community) and you say *ʿAlī Ṣaḥīḥ Allāh* (ʿAlī is truly Lord) its virtues reach the *ʿarsh ʿaẓīm* (the highest throne).

He who utters once the name of *Pīr Shāh*, his excellence is greater than the value of diamonds, rubies and pearls contained in the whole world.

Commentary

Satpanth and *ḥaqīqat-marg* (the path of truth) are synonymous. Their Arabic equivalent is *ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*. The term *Satpanth* (path of the truth) which is used in this *farmān* was the religious name of the Khoja-s. This term occurs in the *ginān*-s. We have chosen some verses of the twenty-eight *garbī*-s which are the *ginān*-s attributed to Pīr Shams (12th c.?).[8] The particularity of these *garbī*-s is that they are all in mid-nineteenth century Gujarati and rooted in Gujarati vernacular culture. These verses describe the genesis of *Satpanth* religion and the religious practices.[9]

***Garbī* 15**

Verse 1: The Guru says: Listen, O Careless Ones!

Verse 2: Why go round and round in the vain circles [of rebirths]?

6 On *Satpanth* see M. Devraj and F. Mallison, "Some Gināns Common to Bārmatī Panthī and Satpanthī Traditions," in T. Kassam and F. Mallison (eds.), *Gināns, texts and contexts*, Delhi, 2010, pp. 55-65; U.B. Jani, "A Thematic study of a Satpanthi Ginān and a Mahapanthi Bajan" in T. Kassam and F. Mallison (eds.), *Gināns, texts and contexts*, Delhi, 2010, pp. 91-98.

7 We can interpret this as meaning ascendants or descendants.

8 The word *ginān* comes from the Sanskrit *Jnāna* meaning Knowledge of oneself (*ātman*) and search for unity with the Supreme Being (*Brahman*). This "Knowledge" leads to salvation. In the context of the Ismāʿīlī-s of South Asia, ginān-s are devotional hymns which accompany the rituals; see note 7 above.

9 On *garbī*-s see I. Surani, "De Haridas à 'Alidas", in N. Khouri and L.J. Pereira (eds.), *Khojas Ismaïli. Du Mozambique colonial à la globalisation*, Paris, 2014, pp. 339-368.

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***Garbī* 16**

Verse 6: His grandfather was Ishvar Adam who was created from the Light of the Deity.

Verse 7: First of all He created the *Panj Tan-i Pāk*[10] (the Five Pure) from his Light

Verse 8: Those who know the secret know that the religion of the Satpanth was founded from that day.

Verse 9: Those who obey the chief (*mukhī*) of the assembly (*jamāʿat*) will be freed of past deeds.

***Garbī* 27**

Verse 3: By drinking this *amīras* (nectar), they were all purified by the Satpanth (true path).

Verse 4: The Lord (*nara*) Qāsim Shāh himself came and gave his beneficient *dīdār* (vision).

Verse 6: He appointed the *mukhī* (head) of the gat (gathering) and all gave offerings.

Verse 7: All gave the exact offering of *dasond* (tithe) and became *munivar* (devotees)

***Garbī* 28**

Verse 4: Whoever sings the *garbī*-s of Satpanth will be relieved of all repentance.

Verse 8: Seventy-one ancestors of those will be saved who hear the *garbī*-s of Satpanth.

The word *jamāʿatkhāna* (prayer hall for the community) does not occur at all in the *ginān*-s. Instead we find the Sanskrit word *ghat*.[11] In this *farmān* we notice the beginning of sacralization of the *jamāʿatkhāna*. Today when the believer crosses the threshold of the *jamāʿatkhāna* he recites the formula « *hai zindā* (He is alive) » to which the assembled congregation replies « *qayam pāyā* (He is always present). » The formula *ʿAlī Ṣaḥīḥ Allāh* is no longer used.

10 *Panj Tan-i Pāk*, (The five pure ones), known in Arabic as *ahl al-bayt, ahl al-kisā'*, they are Muḥammed, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. See M.-A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin dans le shîʿisme originel*, Paris, 2007, pp. 77-78; p. 190, note 383.

11 *Ghat*: a staircase leading to the water's edge, which can be a sacred place known as *tīrtha*, see Charlotte Vaudeville, *Le lac spirituel*, du Rāmāyana de Tulsī-Dās, Paris, 1955, p. 147.

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***farmān* 6, Mumbai [undated]**

Ḥaqq Maulānā Dhanī Salāmat Dātār ʿAlī Shāh Imāme Mumbai mān farmānvel farmān:

The *farmān* made in Mumbai by Our Lord, the veritable authority, the bountiful Imām Āghā ʿAlī Shāh.

"Others have not found the true faith which you possess. The *jamāʿatkhāna* is the house of the Divine. It has a noble rank. He who honours the dignity of the master should also respect each *jamāʿatkhāna*; Until today I have not revealed to anyone the secret but today I will tell you that Maulā Murtaḍā ʿAlī is truly God (*saḥīḥ khudā*). Who does not recognize Maulā Murtaḍā ʿAlī as Lord (*khudā*) is an unbeliever.[12]

The *mijlas* [sic. majlis] (gatherings) which you organize and the prayers that you recite should take place at the *jamāʿatkhāna*. He who says his morning prayers at the *jamāʿatkhāna* with true intention and single heartedly during one hour; his prayer is greater than the prayer said ninety times at home.

God created the heavens and the earth, he created them for the Prophet. When Prophet Muḥammad came into this world then Gabriel appeared and requested: "It is said that your community is imperfect." The Prophet said: "What fate will God inflict upon my community?" Gabriel returned to God and when he came back he told the Prophet: "What you will request on the Day of Judgement will be fulfilled." Fear greatly the Day of Judgement. Observe how the holy men (*awliyā'*) will act there, each one looks to his own interest.

The Qur'ān which descended had forty *sipāra*. The ten *sipāra* which ʿUthmān removed concerned the gnosis (*ginān*).[13]

Belief in ʿAlī as *Ṣaḥīḥ Allāh* (the true Lord) is the daily prayer. The daily prayer (*namāz*) and fasting (*roza*)[14] are the *ẓāhirī* (external) prayers and the *ḥaqīqatī* (true) prayer is to believe that ʿAlī is truly Allāh. This prayer is the noblest.

12 The statement of the Imām "*ʿAlī Ṣaḥīḥ Allāh, ṣaḥīḥ khudā* ('Alī is truly Allāh)" is to be understood as the theophany (*tajallī*) of Deity. We have to distinguish between the human nature of the Imām (*nāsūt*) and his divine essence (*lāhūt*). See M.-A. Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète*, Paris, 2006, pp. 94-108.

13 *Sipāra*: Indo-persian term used for chapter of the Holy Qur'ān.

It is during the reign of the third caliph ʿUthmān (d.656) that the official recension of the verses of the Qur'ān was established. It is known as the vulgate of ʿUthmān. On this subject see Amir-Moezzi, *ibidem*, 2007, pp. 200-227; M.-A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant*, Paris, 2011.

14 From Persian *rūze*.

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In Iran there is a city which contains dwellings of the followers. They truly believe in ʿAlī as Allāh (*Ṣaḥīḥ Allāh*). They are firm in their faith and they also pay the correct *dasond* (tithe). When a child is born they throw him from the top of the mountain and at the moment of throwing him they say: "if you believe that ʿAlī is truly God then stay alive. And if you have faith then stay alive." And when they put him in a fire he does not get burnt. Because they are firm in their faith and correct in paying the *dasond* (tithe), they have attained this degree of perfection (*nuqṭo*). And they receive many blessings. You have found a guide (*guru*) to show you the path. As you know the truth, this is proven in knowledge (*ʿilm*) of the faith. In spite of this you are not united and you are imperfect in paying the *dasond* (tithe). If you had been perfect you would have been rewarded a thousand degrees more than them [the Iranian followers].

The Almighty Lord has given you eyes, hands, feet, noses and ears. He has given you everything. Thank the Lord for this. How much pain the handicapped person has to endure, who suffers with his feet or from other deficiencies.

The prayer of the hands is to inscribe knowledge (*ʿilm*) and to perform good deeds. One should not commit any injustice toward anyone.

The prayer of the eyes is to read learned texts and to consider the wives of others as his mother or sister. One should not look at anyone with a hostile expression.

The prayer of the ears is to listen to wisdom, not to gossip and lying accusations.

The prayer of the feet is to attend the *jamāʿatkhāna* every day, to walk on the path of truth and of virtuous deeds.

The prayer of possessions is to give the exact *dasond* (tithe) from goods honestly acquired. There is no salvation without the *dasond* (tithe). Prayers have no value if you do not give the *dasond* (tithe).

Do not attend dances nor listen to music.

On the Day of Judgment all the Messengers will appear and God will put a seal upon the tongue of each one. Therefore they cannot speak. When the Lord will ask questions then hands, feet and eyes will witness the truth. As in the court of justice, when you testify the truth with the tongue, there you do not need to witness at the Day of Judgment because the members of your body will give witness.

If you crave for paradise then recognize (*shanākhat*) the Imām; *roza* (fast), *namāz* (prayer), *bandagī* (meditation) will be of no use to you if you have not recognized Maulā (Imām). If you have recognized Maulā then perhaps the *roza* and *bandagī* and all other devout activities will be

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taken into account. The meaning of recognition is that the *dasond* (tithe) should be precise. Consider this as recognition of the Imām. For those who give a smaller amount their appreciation would also be less.

How many more days do you wish to live in this world? Your soul is attached to illusion. When the Prophet went on the *miʿrāj* (ascended to the heavens) an angel stood in the way. The Prophet asked him: "Why are you standing there?" He had a thousand heads. Above the heads there were thousands upon thousands of tongues. And his hands had thousands upon thousands of fingers. He answered: "I am measuring the amount of rain. How many raindrops have fallen on the earth? How many raindrops have fallen into the sea? How many raindrops have fallen on food and how much food has been produced?" Then the Prophet asked him: "Do you possess anything uncountable?" Then the angel answered: « the person who recognizes Maulā and seeks his love, I cannot estimate his worth. I am unable to keep account of the one who recites the *salawāt* (prayer) upon the Prophet Muḥammad."

At the time of the Prophet Moses, his followers requested: "Reveal to us the *dīdār* (vision) of God." Then the Prophet Moses told them: "It is very difficult to obtain the vision of God." Let a few worthy persons come with me so I can let them have the experience of *dīdār*. Then seventy persons went to the mountain of Kohetūr.[15] The Prophet Moses then made the request to God for the *dīdār*. God told him: "to have my *dīdār* (vision) is very difficult." After that He granted to a believer the *dīdār* (vision) of a *ḥūrī* through the eye of a needle. And by the light of that *ḥūrī* seventy persons were wiped out, and the Prophet Moses remained alone. This destructive mountain is still visible today on the route to Karbala. This account concerned the *ḥūrī* of a believer; how great should be the splendor of the believer? Pay the exact *dasond* (tithe). Say your three prayers in the way that Pīr Sadardīn has taught you, then you will be admitted to Paradise.

Even if a person has a thousand tongues they are still not enough to praise his Lord. Iblīs who was cast out of Paradise thought that he will lead humans to hell. All of you be cautious, do not declare on the Day of Judgement that our Pīr did not warn us, do not say that. This is the reason that we issue this *farmān*.

If you behave according to the *farmān*-s, you will be on our side, if God wills (*Inshāʾallāh*). Those who do not believe in our *farmān*-s are the

15 *kūh* in Persian means the mountain, and *ṭūr* in Arabic means Mount of Olives. Possibly *Kuh-i Ṭūr* refers to Mount Sinai.

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followers of Satan. I issue this *farmān*: "Attend the *jamāʿatkhāna*, stay awake, keep away from neglect, this existence is vain. A day will come when over sleeping your ribs will feel pain. Be attentive and stay awake, love the *jamāʿatkhāna*, and revere Ḥāḍar[16] Imām. Remain always faithful to Ḥāżar Imām; that will benefit you. Be patient even if anybody insults you four times. Recognize the present cloak (Imām) and be very careful concerning the *dasond* (tithe). Give the exact amount. Do not listen to anyone's gossip. When you come to the *jamāʿatkhāna* concentrate upon listening to the *ginān*-s. If you happen to listen to the gossip of others in the *jamāʿatkhāna*, then you would commit a sin toward the Lord.

When the Prophet proceeded on the *miʿrāj* (ascension), the clothes he was wearing are the same that I am wearing now. The cloak and the turban that you see are the same. The Prophet who proceeded on the *miʿrāj* (ascension), I am this same Messenger (*rasūl*). You the *jamāʿat*, who other than I is the Messenger? I was and at the end also I am the Messenger.

Anyone who will covet the wife of another, his prayer, his devotion and his *dasond* (tithe) will be of no use to him. Whoever ties his heart in coveting the wife of another is a bastard. He is not related to Luqmān.[17] If he ties his heart to the wife of another he will go directly to hell. He will fall into a hell full of lizards as big as camels. There will be no way out.

When you acknowledge Ḥāḍar Imām and consider him to be present then it will benefit you. The present Imām is Āghā Ḥasan ʿAlī Shāh Dātār. Give him the exact *dasond* (tithe) and you will be aware of his qualities. Mawlāna Shāh Ḥasan ʿAlī Shāh is truly the Lord.

One day, when the Prophet Muḥammad was sitting at home, Fāṭima Zahra asked him: « O Prophet, show me God? » The Prophet answered: « Now the hand of the Lord is placed on the head of Imām Ḥusayn. » At that precise moment the hand of Ḥaḍrat ʿAlī was placed on the head of Imām Ḥusayn who was sitting there. Then Bībī Fatima said: « ʿAlī is the Lord! ʿAlī is himself the Lord! » The Prophet said: « Yes, ʿAlī is the Lord. » Who will doubt this will fall into the depths of hell. Of this, you the *jamāʿat* know nothing.

This world is a corpse and those who are craving for it are dogs. The believers are not attached to this world. Do not love this world. I am not

16 From Arabic *ḥāḍir*, meaning one who is present.

17 *Luqmān* is the title of the thirty-first *sūra* (chapter) of the Qurʾān. He is presented as a prototype of the sage who disdains worldly honours or benefits and strives for inner perfection.

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asking you to leave this world, but appreciate it little, and love greatly the wearer of the present cloak (Imām). Give the exact *dasond* (tithe), and let the believers be hopeful. We have given you all the explanation you need.

Remember that your religion is that of God and of his Messenger, for this be happy and practice *bandagī* (devotion). I am not saying that you should not practice the *namāz* (*ṣalāt* in Arabic, ritual prayer) and the *roza* (*saum* in arabic, fasting). These prayers are *ẓāhirī* (external). You will not be united (*waṣl*) to God in this way. Without the *dasond* (tithe) they are not accepted.

The prayer to approach God is to repeat always « *pīr shāh* ». Read the *ginān*-s, speak no evil of anyone, and do not lie. God has given you a tongue for uttering « *pīr shāh* ».

The prayer of the eyes is to make always the *dīdār* (to have the vision) of the Messenger of God, not to point out the faults of others and to consider another man's wife as your mother or sister.

The prayer of the hands is to put aside the share of our Imām from the daily bread that the Almighty Lord gives to us, and to perform good deeds.

The prayer of the ears is not to listen to evil gossip and calumny, but to listen to the words of the Almighty.

The prayer of the feet is not to proceed towards bad deeds; walk always on the path of the truth and when it is time for *bandagī* (devotion) then go to the *jamāʿatkhāna*. But if at that time you have work to do then leave it and go to the *jamāʿatkhāna* to say your prayers. Then you will attain your original abode.

When the Day of Judgment will come then Ḥażrat ʿAlī will be seated on the throne and every person will have a seal upon his tongue. He will ask their hands and feet to bear witness. Your hands and your feet will speak of what good deeds you have done, and your hands and eyes will bear witness. Then your face will be like the sun at noon and will become red like the burning iron. Those who have stolen the *dasond* (tithe) will be detected there, and those who have been correct in paying the *dasond* (tithe) will be seated under the parasol. The sinners will be seated there but we will not listen to their complaints.

You do not believe in the *farmān* which we are now issuing and you are seated like women, but when the Day of Judgment will come, those who have stolen the *dasond* (tithe) will receive a blow, they will beseech and will cry. But nobody will listen to their complaints and no one will pity them.

There brother, sister, mother, father and friends, no one will help you, they will remain there trembling.

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He who has believed in our *farmān*-s and paid the *dasond* (tithe), his sins will be forgiven. If you wish to have the *dīdār* (the divine vision), attend the assembly, repent and pay the exact amount of *dasond* (tithe). If you do not give the dues to the Lord, then you will continue to suffer. You came promising to pay the *dasond* (tithe), so you have a debt towards the Almighty. This is for your material body. The Lord gains nothing from this. He provides you with your daily bread. The Lord is not in need of money. But you have made an oath and we are reminding you of it for the salvation of your soul. Pay your debt to the Lord and be happy. And he who does not believe in our *farmān*-s, he will fall directly into the deepest depth of hell.

The person who has given the exact *dasond* (tithe) will enjoy eternal happiness.

To the true believers Murtaḍā ʿAlī will grant a kingdom in the heavens which you cannot find here even if all the wealth of the world could be gathered. Therefore the Lord is not in need of money. I tell you this because I have become responsible for you. If you behave honestly then I can hold up my head facing the Lord. If you wish to listen to more we will let you hear, come to our residence.

Commentary

The content of this long *farmān* echoes parts of the text of Pandiyāt-i-Jawānmardī which also resembles a series of long sermons. Whoever might be the author of the *farmān*, the Imām or a preacher, there is no doubt that they were inspired by this text. What appears in this *farmān* is the policy of centralization initiated by the Imām to consolidate his authority. This is done through the sacralisation of the *jamāʿatkhāna* presented as the house of the Lord. This *farmān* also reflects the intra-communal dissension among the Khoja-s at the time of the establishment of Ḥasan ʿAlī Shāh, Āghā Khān I in India in 1845. This concerned the payment of the *dasond* which was to result in legal conflicts. Some Khoja-s will become Sunnī-s and others Ithnā ʿAsharī-s.[18] It is necessary to point out some key words which are familiar to the Khoja Ismāʿīlī-s even today. For our commentary we refer to the text of Pandiyāt-i-Jawānmardī and to the ginān-s because they reflect clearly the beliefs of the Khoja Ismāʿīlī-s concerning their religious practices. The key words are:

18 See T.R. Kassam, *Songs of wisdom and circles of dance*, New York, 1995, pp. 27-36.

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dasond (in Gujarati), *ʿushr allāh* (in Arabic), *dah-yak* (in Persian) means tithe. In Pandiyat-i-Jawanmardi, p. 55 we read: "The tithe has been established by the King of Men Murtaḍā ʿAlī.

He commanded the adepts of the Truth (*ḥaqīqatiyān*) saying that everyone who is the follower of the Truth (*ahl-i ḥaqīqat*), and has the desire of his *dīdār*, must pay the tithe (ten percent) from his income. By this he may secure the chance of the *dīdār*.

We give below the translation of selected verses from *garbī* 2 and *garbī* 19 which strongly recommend the payment of *dasond*.

***garbī* 2**

verse 5: Be loyal in giving the offering (*dāna*) of tithe (*dasond*)! Then you will reap success.

***garbī* 19**

verse 12: Holding it carefully, it inscribed on it those who accepted the religion of *Satpanth*.

verse 13: It was then that the debt of tithe (*dasond*) began, the payment of which brings freedom.

verse 14: Make that offering (*dān*) from the fruits of your own labors- such is the true tithe.[19]

roza (fast), ***namāz, bandagī*** (devotion).

In *Pandiyāt-i-Jawānmardī*, p. 49, we read: "It is easy to recite *namāz* (prayers), every old woman can do this. Therefore praying is an occupation suitable for women, but what suits the man is to be ready to sacrifice all that he has and his own life for the one he loves (*jānān*). Therefore the *namāz* is for old women, and the paying of duty is for the (real) men. In this world of perishable things you cannot get anything unless you pay for it. Therefore why these eternal values should be given free, without payment? Come forward then, with money, not with prayers. First pay, then pray, so that your prayer may be acceptable."

19 For verse 5 of *garbī* 2, and verses 12, 13 and 14 of *garbī* 19, see T.R. Kassam, *ibidem*, 1995, pp. 322; 355.

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We are giving the translation of three verses from the ginān attributed to Pīr Shams: *hamdīla khālaka allāha sohī vasejī* (In my heart resides Allāh the Creator).[20]

> 6-My mind is my *muṣallā* (prayer- mat) and Allāh is my *qāḍī* (judge),
> My body is my *masita* (the mosque). Indeed, He is Allāh!
> 7-Within myself, I sit and perform *namāz* (prayer),
> What can a fool know of my worship (*ṭā'at*). Indeed, He is Allāh!
> 8-If I get food, it is *rozī* (daily bread, feast), if not, it is *roza* (fast),
> Thus my mind remains fixed on my Sāheb. Indeed, He is Allāh!

mijlas, (gatherings) and the Sanskrit equivalent is *satsang*. In the context of the Imāmī Ismā'īlīs, *mijlas* is a restricted group of believers who gather for special prayers and to stimulate their faith. To be a member of a *mijlas* is voluntary and a lifelong commitment, with a one-time financial contribution when joining. There are about half a dozen of *mijlas*: *mijlas* of *bayt-ul khiyāl* ("house of meditation"), *pānc bār sāl* (a tradition which goes back to the Fātimids when the faithful devoted five to twelve years of their lives to the service of the Imām), *cānd rāt* (new moon), *panje-bhāī* (union in brotherhood like the five fingers of the hand), *panje-bhenu* (union in sisterhood), *student majlis*. These *mijlas* are pious meetings which may be monthly, every three months or annually, during which sermons are delivered, *ginān*-s are sung, *farmān* related to the particular *mijlas* is read, prayers are recited, and a short collective meditation is practiced. Both women and men can be full members of these *mijlas*. They usually take place at the *jamā'atkhāna* but according to this *farmān* it seems that previously they may have been held in private premises.

bandagī 'ibāda: in the context of Khoja Ismaili (s) *bandagi 'ibādat* refer to a specific prayer which consists of meditating during one hour, at four o'clock in the morning, upon a word.

bol (in Gujarati), *ism-i a'ẓam* (in Arabic) is the Word given by the Imām to a believer who makes a request for it. This practice is voluntary and not obligatory but once a believer has accepted the *bol* it becomes obligatory. It is taught that through this practice one can attain the spiritual *dīdār*.

The mode of prayer prescribed in the *ginān* « *sat sabad hae gur hamārā* (The True Word is our guide) » attributed to the Pīr Shams is to recite « *pīr shāh, pīr*

20 Tazim Kassam has given the full translation of this ginān which is composed of 11 verses; see T.R. Kassam, *ibidem*, 1995, pp. 232-233.

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shāh » as often as possible. The *duʿā'* which has become the canonical prayer today did not exist then.

We give below the translation of the first three verses of the *ginān* « *sat sabad hae gur hamārā* »[21]

1-The True Word is my Guide, which is not perceived by this world.
2-Reflect upon the word of truth. Repeat again and again « *pīr shāh* ».
3-First fix your attention with the tongue. Through night and day say « *pīr shāh, pīr shāh* ».

dīdār (the vision). In the context of the Khoja Ismāʿīlī-s, there are two kinds of *dīdār*: the *ẓāhirī dīdār* which is to see the Imām physically when he visits the *jamāʿat* (the assembly); and the *bāṭinī dīdār*, through the practice of *bandagi*, the believer strives to attain the eternal light (*nūr*) of the Imam which is characterized by the expression of *fanā' fi llāh*, (absorbed in Deity)".

ḥaqīqatī in the Pandiyāt-i-Jawānmardī, p. 2, we read: ... "The foundation of *haqīqat* is to recognize the Imām. The purpose (*maqṣūd*) of everything is to recognize its inner meaning (*bāṭin*), which forms its (real) substance (*jawhar*), its essence and sweetness. Therefore the ultimate purpose of *sharīʿat* (introduced) by the Prophet was its inner meaning (*bāṭin*), which was *ḥaqīqat*, i.e. the recognition of the Imām of the time."

***farmān* 12, Mumbai 1881**

When the authority our Lord Maulānā Shāh Ḥasan ʿAlī Shāh, our spiritual mother and father, abandoned his earthly cloak (died), then Pīr Salāmat Guru Dātar, our spiritual mother and father, Āghā ʿAlī Shāh succeeded to the throne of Imāmat and then said:

« Jamāʿat (community) of Mumbai, of Kathiavar, of Halar, of Surat, of Kucch, of Sind and of Punjab, and of Zanzibar and to all my Jamāʿat(s) who have come from outside, we forgive all the sins of my Jamāʿat(s). *Khānavadan.*

O believers, we are in this world your spiritual and temporal leader, Imām, and we are truly your *Khudāvand* (Lord). I am *Yā ʿAlī*. I am myself Imām Ḥusayn. Ask us what you will. If you are diffident to ask in the *jamaʿatkhāna* then come to our residence in Vari. From the rising to the setting of the sun, ask. To ignore our *farmān*-s and believe in the preaching of the mullāh-s who will hold your hand? We are the first and we are also the last. Why do we give you *farmān*-s easy to understand? Because

21 See C. Shackle and Z. Moir, *ibidem*, 1992, pp. 90-92.

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you have come into our presence. We are suffering on your behalf. Our heart will suffer if your attitude would be like that of others. Therefore believe only in us.

Those whose *duʿāʾ*, *dasond* and *ʿibāda* (devotion) are incorrect, then slowly their faith will fade away.

Those who will not believe in our *farmān*-s they will err and will not recognize our rank. To know us is difficult. During the time of Imām Ḥusayn only seventy two close companions amongst his numerous followers truly recognized him as their Imām and supported him.

Commentary

What is implicit in this *farmān* is the questioning of the Āghā Khān's authority as religious leader by certain Khoja-s. This is the reason for warning his followers against the influence of the Ithnāʾ ʿAsharī mullāh-s (clerics). Some will become Khoja Sunnī (s), others will become Khoja Ithnāʾ ʿAsharī-s (Twelvers); the majority will remain faithful to the Āghā Khān. They now identify themselves more and more as Khoja Imāmī Ismāʿīlī-s. It is interesting to point out that in this *farmān* the Imām identifies himself as *Khudāvand* (the Lord) and with the two charismatic Shīʿī figures of ʿAlī and Ḥusayn. His statement "We are the first and we are also the last" recalls the verses of the Qurʾān [57:3] "He is the First and the Last, and the Outward as well as the Inward [*al-awwal wa l-ākhir, al-ẓāhir wa al-bāṭin, alpha and omega*]: and He has full knowledge of everything". In the context of the Imāmī Ismāʿīlī-s the Imām assumes the double role that of divine authority and historical ruler. It is therefore sometimes difficult to distinguish between the ontological Imām and the historical Imām. The *duʿāʾ*, *dasond* and *ʿibāda* are presented as the pillars of the faith.

***farmān* 13, Mumbai 1884**

Sarkār Maulānā Shāh Aghā ʿAlī Shāh Mā Bāp (our spiritual mother and father) has said:

O *muʾmino* (believers)! Do not become prisoners of this world. Poor or rich, everybody must die. So why are you deteriorating the faith by your deeds? But those who forget *khudā* (Lord) are not on the right path. The way ahead is very hard.

Keep your faith as did Nusayri Qambar, Mālik Ustar and Salmān Fāras.[22] What is the advantage of becoming blind like the mullāh-s?

22 Qambar, a freed slave of ʿAlī. It is interesting to note here that the Gujarati text links Qambar with the Nuṣayriyya (Alawite) movement founded by Ibn Nuṣayr in the ninth century. Mālik al-Ashtar, companion of ʿAlī appointed governor of Egypt in in 658

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O believers! The *sharīʿatī* mullāh-s (who interpret literally) were speaking of Nusayri that he became a *kāfir* (an unbeliever), then what difference does it make? What has Nusayri lost? Their faces have become blackened.

See how a man asked the holy Prophet: « O Messenger of God! Who will go to heaven? » He answered that the 73rd *firqo* (group) will go to Paradise. O human being, the remaining seventy two will wander in the wilderness.[23] Then a follower made this request: « What are the signs of this group? » Then the Prophet replied: « they will not observe the *roza* (fast), they will not perform the *namāz* (prayer), and they will not wear out the prayer rugs of the literalists. But they will be strong in the love of *Yā ʿAlī* and of the *ahl al-bayt* (the people of the family). » Glory to the Lord! You are the beloved of the *ahl al-bayt* (the people of the family), and *Yā ʿAlī*, the true Lord, is present and seated beside you.

O believers! The mullāh-s were the enemies of all the Messengers and Imām-s in the past. They never believed in any Messenger nor in any Imām correctly. Do you not know that?

The jamāʾat replied: « O Lord! We know this already. »

Mawlā answered: "Glory to the Lord! From today on be very watchful."

Later the Lord asked the jamāʿat: « Are we not *Yā ʿAlī*? »

The jamāʾat replied: « O Maulā you are truly the Lord of the worlds and you are yourself *Yā ʿAlī.*

(38 AH); Salmān the Persian (Salmān al-Fārisī), a companion of the Prophet and ʿAlī. These figures are the paragons of loyalty to the Imām. Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh in a number of his *farmān*-s, declares that Salmān Fāras belongs to the *ahl al-bayt*, also known as *ahl al-kisāʾ* (Family of the Prophet, that is Muḥammad, ʿAlī, Fāṭima, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn.). In *The Kalāme Imām Mubīn*, 1953, pp. 217-218, we read: "… If you read well books concerning gnosis and behave accordingly to them you will become like the angels. Do not remain self-satisfied at the same stage. Mount the first step, then the second step, and from there to the third step. By mounting step by step you will become like Salmān Fāras. He reached the state of *ahl al-bayt*. You too if you act like him will become members of *ahl al-bayt*. How many followers are the members of *ahl al-bayt*. There are many followers, who with courage, can go even further than the *ahl al-bayt*, therefore be courageous …"

For some other traditions relating to Salmān al-Fārisī see for example M.-A. Amir-Moezzi, *La religion discrète*, Paris, 2006, pp. 206; 344.

23 This refers to the famous Prophetic hadith on 73 sects. For a detailed study of this tradition see F. Bouchiba, "Un manuscrit inédit d'hérésiographie: Mabhath al firaq (Recherche sur les sectes) du Shaykh Atfayyish (m. 1914)" in F. Ersilia (ed.), *Ibadi Theology. Rereading Sources and Scholarly Works*, Hildesheim, 2015, pp. 297-314.

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Then he said: « Bravo. You will have no fear, o believers! I am telling you that those who leave our faith and run after the mullāh-s are also ill-begotten. The *duʿā'* and the *namāz* are the same, the difference is only in names. Understand that God knows all languages. We do not want that Lord who knows only Arabic and no other languages. He knows also the language of fishes who live in the water.

Therefore consider Murtaḍa ʿAlī as truly Lord (*khudā*) and his Light is in us. »

O believers! Everything that exists is found within us. You are mine in this world and you will also be mine in the world beyond. We will keep you company until the end. Ḥaḍrat ʿĪsā (Blessed Jesus), Mūsā (Blessed Moses) and many others have sacrificed their lives for our love. You too should be like them. »

Khānavadan

Commentary

We remark that in the formula of introduction the Imām is also called *mā-bāp* (spiritual mother-father), and he refers to his followers as his spiritual children. It is possible to suggest that these expressions are rooted in the Hindu tradition.

What is implicit in this *farmān* are the arguments concerning the religious rituals between the dissident Khoja-s and those who remained faithful to the Āghā Khān. It should be understood that this *farmān* was issued during a period of intercommunal tension between the Khoja-s (see our commentary above of *farmān* 6).

In this *farmān* it is clearly stated that neither the language nor the mode of prayer are important. It appears that the spirit should always prevail over the literal meaning. Because the Khoja Ismāʿīlī-s do not observe the common Islamic rituals such as *roza* (fast), *namāz* (prayer), they consider themselves as being *ḥaqīqatī* or *bātinī* (esoteric) and that they have access to Paradise. Nevertheless they are extremely ritualistic in their own way; for example the obligation of the regular attendance at the *jamāʿatkhāna*, the daily recitation of the three times *duʿā'* the remitting of the *dasond*, etc.

In this *farmān* the Imām requests his followers to bear witness that he is truly ʿAlī, the ontological and the first historical Imām, to justify his function. He warns them against the influence of the mullāh-s who are described as the literal interpreters and requests them to take as examples of *fidā'ī* Nusayri Qambar, Mālik Ustar, Salmān Fāras, Jesus and Moses who are absolutely devoted to Him. We notice that he is careful not to mention Prophet Muhammad.

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The sentence in the *farmān* when he asks the jamā'at: « Are we not *Yā ʿAlī*? », echoes the verse 172 of Sūra 7 of the Qur'ān «... Am I not your Lord? »

5 The *Kalāme Imām Mubīn*

The *farmān* attributed to the 48th Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh (d. 1957) have come down to us in Gujarati in a two volume collection called *Kalame Imām Mubīn*. They continue to have an important influence upon the believers who consider them as the official manual for their religious practices. The first volume (1953) contains 160 *farmān*-s from 1885 to 1910, and the second volume (1951) contains 442 *farmān*-s from 1911 to 1951. All together there are 602 *farmān*-s issued during sixty six years of his Imāmat. There were 3000 copies of each volume published by the Ismaili Association for India for the exclusive use of Imāmi Ismāʿīlī-s. Some *farmān*-s continue to be published separately such as *Rūhānī Raushnī* (spiritual brightness) which we consider the spiritual heritage of the teaching of the Imām.

The *farmān*-s in the first volume deal essentially with religious questions and implicitly the construction of religious identity of the Khoja-s. Those in the second volume deal with the daily socio-economic, health and education questions in the context of migration.

For the present article, we have used the first volume of the second edition of 1953 which is in our possession. The text contains two introductions, the first of 1950, the second of 1953, an index of four columns [pp. 11-16], the first column gives the number of the *farmān*, the second gives the name of the place where the *farmān* was issued, the third the date, and the fourth refers to the page number. The 160 *farmān*-s are classified in chronological order and they are distributed over 356 pages. The second volume which is in our possession is the 1951 edition, which contains 442 *farmān*-s distributed over 493 pages. The text contains an introduction, nine pages of three column index, and it ends with a general index in alphabetic order. The introduction is by Ghulāmhusayn Ghulamhussain S. Thawarbhay, President of Ismailia Association for India. It is written in Mumbai on 9th of June 1951.

The Introduction to the Kalāme Imām Mubīn

The introduction inform us that the edition of the holy *farmān*-s of Maulānā Ḥāḍar Imām Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh (d. 1957), our spiritual father, the 48th Imām since the first Imām Murtaḍā ʿAlī (d. 661) was undertaken for the celebration of seventy years of his Imāmat.

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They are presented in the form of continuous exhortations and sermons (*wāʿiẓ*) based upon quotations of some verses of Qurʾān, hadīth-s and some verses of *ginān*-s emphasizing the necessity to have an Imām physically present without whom the world cannot exist.[24] They remind the Ismāʿīlī-s of their immense good fortune in that they have an Imām physically present to guide them. The authors of the introductions remind the believers that the sayings of the Imām are the words uttered by the Prophet himself, and they are for the salvation of their souls. Hence, *farmānbardārī* (obedience), the key word, is presented as the foundation of the Ismāʿīlī faith.

The author quotes the following *farmān*: « I always issue *farmān*-s. Behave according to the last *farmān* issued. » which emphases that the believer must follow the commands of the most recent *farmān*-s.[25]

We quote the thought of Ghulāmhusayn S. Thawarbhay, President of the Ismaili Association for India , on the necessity to have an Imām physically present:

> « The times change continually and new questions and difficulties are presented to the people for whom past solutions are insufficient. In this life people of different religions try to bring ancient solutions to the new questions and they become bewildered. When they do not find solutions, then they build walls made of the ancient laws and praise them to hide their imperfection. »
>
> The only elements that we possess concerning the methods of collecting the *farmān*-s are to be found in the acknowledgments of the authors. We are giving here the translation:
>
> To prepare the collection of the *farmān*-s, different volumes of the famān-s which were published elsewhere, and old manuscripts have been used. Mukhi Rai Mahdi Rajabaly Mevavara, and Hasanaly Chief Vazir Kassamaly Hassanaly Zaveri have examined and given their enlightened advice.

24 We have placed an asterisk to the enumeration of the verses of Qurʾān to indicate that the authors mention only the first part of the verse of Qurʾān and not the complete one. The verses quoted are: [36:12*; 4; 175; 57:3; 24:35*; 48:6; 4:59*; 51:56; 3:103*]. The ḥadith-s: The *farmān* of the third Imām ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (d. 712) is quoted as: "*shanākhat* (the recognition) of the Imām of the time is the *maʿrifat* (knowledge) of God. Your obedience toward the present Imām should be the same as that to God. It is said, He is from God. Concerning this, while heaven and earth continue to exist, it is necessary for the servants of God to recognize the present Imām and to obey him."

25 See *farmān* n°48 issued on 26-02-1900 in "Kalām-e Imām Mubīn", vol. 1, Ismailia Association for India, Mumbai, 1953, p. 125.

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After having collected the *farmān*-s from different countries and translated some of them, the missionary Mamodebhay Muradaly spent a whole year in editing them and finalising this edition. These elements, however small they may be, bear witness to the policy of the Ismailia Association for India to centralize all the *farmān*-s and to produce an official text of which the *Kalāme Imām Mubīn* is the apogee.

The introduction does not inform us under what criteria these *farmān*-s have been chosen, their origins, from what languages they were translated into Gujarati, their critical examination, and finally who chose to publish these *farmān*-s. We are giving now the translation of the first *farmān*-s in the first volume.

Translation from Gujarati into English of the first *farmān* issued by Imām Āghā Sulṭān Muhammad Shāh from Kalām e Imām Mubīn, Vol. I [1885-1910].

***Farmān* 1, Mumbai, Friday 1st September 1885, [pp. 1-5].**

Our Lord, the true authority, the beneficient present Imām Āghā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh, having succeeded to the Imāmat at the age of approximatively eight years old on Monday 17th August 1885, went fifteen days later to the Darkhana of Mumbai, ascended the throne, gave the *dīdār* to the jamāʿat (assembly) and said:

O Jamāʿat! We belong to the family of the Messenger and our grand-father is Ḥaḍrat Amīr Mu'minīn and our grand-mother is Khātun Jannat (Lady of Paradise), Ḥaḍrat Bībī Fāṭima. We are the light of both, of ʿAlī and of the Prophet. It is true that we are young in age but we are noble in lineage. Ḥaḍrat Maulā Murtaḍa ʿAlī was young and in his youth he won the fort of Khaybar, and he supported the weight of the fort's door to let all the armies pass through and he killed the wicked unbeliever Jibra.

Apparently, at home, he ate barley bread but outside he tore the mountains apart. Within an instant he could reach the other end of the world. Anyone who would beg for the help of Maulā Murtaḍa ʿAlī then he carried out his wishes and appeased his difficulties. We are the offspring of this Murtaḍa ʿAlī. Keep our *farmān*-s; keep them in your heart."

Ḥaḍrat Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn was also young in age but in strength and in knowledge he was like Murtaḍa ʿAlī. Our light also comes from them. And the Light of ʿAlī is eternally present in this world. This is the

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end of time (*ākhar zaman*) in which believers could see the divine power and the miracles of the Imām of time; but those who doubt in their hearts, even if they see the miracles they would consider them to be false. Those who have not believed in the miracles of the Messenger and of the Imām, they are like the blind. If you give to a blind person a small mirror or a plate of clay, both have the same meaning for him.

Those who half-believe consider us like them. In appearance we are seated like the dervish (*darvesh*), but in the realm of the Lord we are to be respected (*buzurg*). The reason is that we belong to the family of the Messenger (*paighambar*). Those who are versed in the knowledge (*ʿilm*) will understand the fame of the divine power of our house but those who only half-believe will not trust us. How can we show affection to those who are of this mind? They harm themselves, but this will not affect us.

Besides that those who doubt in their hearts think that our guide (*murshid*) is taking money. This understanding is incorrect. We are the dervish (*darvesh*) of the family of the Messenger. We shall accept what you will give us with pleasure but we shall not accept anything if you are saddened thereby. We find it pleasant to accept what you give us willingly with joy. If you give us sincerely then in the next world for one coin given here you will receive one hundred and twenty five thousand coins. In this world also you will receive benefits. But if you give unwillingly in your heart, then your money is useless and from this you will gain no benefit from us. We will spend none of the money thus offered. The money will go as it came. In the same way as thorns or citrus trees give fruits, in the same fashion you will receive your reward.

The money of the *muʾmin* (s) (true believers) enters the *baytul māl* (the house of treasure). We are using it for the education of the poor, for our daily bread and for our clothes. The money of such believers is spent on good deeds and in this there are many advantages about which we will not speak now. But do not think there can be salvation without giving. In all religions in this world one has to give. And in the religion of Islam there are three ways of giving:

1) The *ʿushr allāh* (the tithe) which is in the Qurʾān is the *dasond* (the tithe); in Arabia the governors used to tax everybody.
2) The *khums* (one fifth) which is for the Imām.
3) The *zakāt* (alms) which is for the poor.

All these rights mentioned above are ours, and from them we bestow to those who are entitled to receive them. This divine order is prescribed to

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you forever. Those who were *raja-s* (rulers) earlier, they also have not made any changes in these matters. Now, if anyone wishes to bring changes, how is it possible?

The share of the *hākim* (governor) belongs to him and we are your governor. We are leader since the beginning of the Imāmī Shīʿa and the *ʿulumo* (learned) must have read the books concerning that subject.

Our *buzurg* (respected) father has said: "When we were governors we sent you the Pīr-s to convert you to the true religion. And the Pīr-s have resolved that subject; you can find this teaching in the *ginān*-s.

O Jamāʿat! See now, all these subjects and examples are the proof that our right upon you is confirmed by the Book and the Qurʾān. If you give our rights now it is good; otherwise on the Day of Judgement you will have to give. Hence be careful about this subject and give us our right otherwise you will regret it.

In earlier days we used to give to the jamāʿat the title of dervish (*darvesh*) but many people did not appreciate this title, therefore we removed it."

After that Maulānā Ḥāḍar Imām said:

To all my jamāʿat we are giving our prayers of blessing. To you, all the jamāʿat, women and men, small and large, you are our children, you are our eyes, in this world we show the path of virtue, therefore never forget our house and do not be disunited. Our house is the house of the family of the Prophet and we belong to his family, the proof of which is in the Qurʾān.

Those who join the Ithnāʾ ʿĀsharī (Twelvers), their school of thought is not ours. They do not recognize us. Do not make the mistake of joining them. They declare: « The Imām must be present and eternal in this world. The world cannot be deprived of the Imām. It is necessary to have the Imām in this world. » However, they do not understand. On the one hand they praise the Prophet's family; and on the other hand they say: « There is no other Imām after *imām bārah* (the twelfth imam). »

Do they still not understand, nor do they think that it is for one thousand to twelve hundred years that the Imām is concealed? They entertain a relationship with the Imām as « *Ṣāhib Zamān* » (Lord of the time), but they do not understand its meaning. Their Imām is not present in this world so how can we give him the title of *Ṣāhib Zamān*?

The Imām must be present in this world. He is the pillar of this world.

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We do not have to quote the ḥadith-s. Although these hadīth-s exist no one can understand their meaning. There are many learned persons who explain that the descendant of the Imām is in this world but he is hidden. Imām Mahdī will manifest himself, his father's name will be ʿAbdullāh, his own name will be Muḥammad. He will appear at the end of time and will establish only one religion in the world and those who will recognize him will be the true believers; Imāme Zamān (the Imām of time) will manifest himself to them at the end of time. These believers will help him. In this manner they interpret the hadīth-s. But darkness has fallen upon their eyes and for this reason they do not recognize the Imām, and they have forgotten this hadīth.

How many others have made a false claim of being the Mahdī and how many in their naiveté follow him because of the wrong interpretation. We only recommend to you that you should keep your faith safe, distinguish between right and wrong and to do this make sure in your heart that you can see the truth.

Each one should guard his faith. If it is gold it will have the value of gold, if it is in silver then it will have the value of silver. What is made of copper or iron will have those values. What are the values of stones? Recognize the truth and what is false. Inshā'allāh, those who recognize us are the jewelers, the value of the weight of one atom is a hundred times greater. Proceed with truth and with faith. *Khānavadan*.

Commentary

The first *farmān*-s attributed to Āghā Sulṭān Muḥammad Shāh (1877-1957) are typical examples of the construction of religious identity created *a posteriori*. At that time the Imām was only eight years old and could not have uttered such long speeches, nor explain so clearly the spiritual function of the Imām. He recalls the youth of the first Imām ʿAlī (m. 661) and of the third Imām Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (m. 712) to confirm his legitimacy for his Imāmat. For the faithful believers the fact that young Imām can utter such words is part of his innate spiritual knowledge. What appears behind the words of this first *farmān* is the doubt and the questioning of some of his Khoja-s followers concerning his authority, therefore his legality to collect different religious taxes. The introduction of a Shīʿī arabo-islamic vocabulary is part of the construction of religious identity. For example, the terms *ʿushr allāh* (tithe), *khums* (the fifth), *zakāt* (alms) to qualify different taxes are not part of the everyday vocabulary of the Khoja-s Ismāʿīlī of South Asia. This vocabulary is still alien to them. *Dasond* (tithe), *dan* (alms) are the recurrent words to be found in the *ginān*-s and in the *farmān*-s. Nor do we find in the Pandiyāt-i Jawānmardī (XVth century) the use of the Gujarati vocabulary. The only term which occurs for the tithe is *dah yak*

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(tithe). No other taxes are mentioned. Today the policy of reforms which was begun in 1975 to re-write the religious texts in the vocabulary of Arabic origin is gradually replacing terms of Hindu origin.[26]

6 Precious Gems

We have selected two *farmān*-s of the present Imām Nūr Maulānā Shāh Karīm al-Ḥusaynī Hāḍar Imām, Āghā Khān IV (b. 1938) from the text of Precious Gems which is published by H.H. Prince Aga Khan Shia Imami Ismailia Association for Canada. The text contains 116 *farmān*-s, a page with a quotation of a verse of Qurʾān, and of a hadīth, a page with the picture of the Imām and a page of contents. There is no introduction.

The present Imām expresses himself in English or in French. We propose to reproduce below two of the *farmān*-s he made when he visited the Jamāʿat. They have also been translated into literary Gujarati, contrary to the *farmān*-s attributed to Sulṭān Muhammad Shāh which were in vernacular Gujarati. Each *farmān* in the Gujarati edition begins with the consecrated formula « *Nūr Maulānā Shāh Karīm Hāzar Imāme farmāvyun ke ...* »

> ***Farmān* 32, Mumbai, 22th November, 1967**
> It is important that in learning parts of the Qurʾān, you must clearly understand the meaning
>
> I hope that you will not forget that the meaning is the foundation of our concept of Islam, because our concept is esoteric. If it were exoteric, then it would not matter. But it is not exoteric, it is esoteric, which means the meaning is for our Jamat; it is for our Tarīqa and this is the foundation. So do not forget this.

> ***Farmān* 61, Mumbai, 22th November, 1967**
> My beloved spiritual children,
>
> I have asked some general questions about the relationship between Islam and Christianity and between Islam and Judaism, because it is important that in your studies you should widen your overall knowledge as to the background and the relationship between world faiths. It is quite obvious that Christ could not have been physically the son of God, simply because the physical relationship of a father and a son is a human

26 See M. Boivin, "Gināns and the Management of the Religious Heritage of the Ismaili Khojas in Sindh" in T. Kassam and F. Mallison (eds.), *Gināns, texts and contexts*, Delhi, 2010, pp. 25-48.

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concept, and as Muslims we are forbidden to attach human concepts to God. Therefore, such a relationship of father to son could not have existed. It is important that these basic principles should be well understood by those who instruct our *jamā'at* in the practice of their faith.

Commentary

We remark that the *farmān* n°32 is issued at the same place and on the same date as n°61. In the absence of any introduction or explanation on how these *farmān*-s have been collected by the editor, we can only assume that they were issued by the Imām to jamā'at at different *mijlas*. In this *farmān* the Imām is no longer presented as the tenth *Avatār* (descent, incarnation) of Lord Vishnu,[27] nor does he describe himself as *ṣāḥīḥ allāh*. It clearly states that the Khoja-s are now rooted in the tradition the Shī'a Imāmī Ismā'īlī.

Conclusion

The *farmān*-s that we have studied in this paper demonstrate how the successive Imām-s since the mid-19th century have undertaken the policy of centralising the community to reinforce their authority and prevent intra-communal disputes. This policy was made possible through the socialization of the believers by making sacred the *jamā'atkhāna*, declared to be the house of the Lord, the common religious practices of all the Ismā'īlī-s from different cultural backgrounds, and declaration of the Constitution which is the spine of the community.

This study also demonstrates how a speech uttered by an Imām, memorized by certain members of the community, and then collected by appointed members in charge of preparing the compendium which will later be published may influence belief. These texts are reserved exclusively for the use of the community.

In the absence of any critical study of these texts within their historical context, the *farmān*-s can almost be interpreted as dogma. The original hybrid community of Islamic/Satpanthi in South Asia has today resulted in the existence of the Shī'a Imāmī Ismā'īlī Tarīqa and its international diaspora.

27 Lord Vishnu is one of the three chief Hindu Gods often known as Hari. His spouse is the Goddess Laksmī. He is well known for the series of his *avatāra-s* (incarnations). His best known *avatāra-s* are Rāma and Krishna, who are objects of veneration. In the major *ginān*, the "*Tenth Avātar*", 'Alī is venerated as the tenth *avatār* of Lord Vishnu. This ginān was recited by the Khoja ismā'ili-s until the middle of the 20th century. Today this ginān has been withdrawn. On Vishnu, see John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion*, Delhi, 1993, pp. 360-362.

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